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Date: Mon, 5 Apr 1999 23:28:39 -0700
To: Harold_Varmus@nih.gov
From: "Patrick O. Brown" <pbrown@cmgm.stanford.edu>
Subject: comments on latest E-biomed draft
Status: RO

Hi Harold,

Thanks for sending me the new draft of your proposal. I've marked comments on it (highlighting changes using MS Word). I've suggested some changes to the text as well as inserting parenthetical comments and questions. I'm attaching two versions, one of which has the changes shown with bold italic text (the pbcomments1 version). The other is much easier to look at if you can use the highlight changes function in MS Word.

I like the proposal very much as it is.

However, I still think it's a lot more abiguous and tentative and apologetic than it needs to be. I understand the concern about not wanting to appear heavy handed. But there's nothing to be gained by giving any credit to the publishers' arguments to this effect. After all, the proposal is not to IMPOSE a change on the system, only to offer, for the first time, a real alternative. Therefore, after the E-biomed system is launched, scientific publication will change only if the scientific community decides it wants to change things. NIH will simply be creating an opportunity for evolution - gradual if that's what the community wants, fast if the community makes it happen fast. Inviting a long debate and discussion before doing anything is mostly a waste of time. The way to start a meaningful discussion is to launch the project and see what happens.

I also think the future is in mechanism 2, and that it would be pointlessly destructive to cripple it from the start by calling it a repository for second class papers that might not even be published at all by the current journals. That's the way the conventional journal editors want it to be viewed, but why should we paint it that way? Maybe you have good reason that I just don't understand.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts in return. I hope you don't think I'm being too argumentative about this, but there's no point in being wishy-washy.

Would it be OK with you if I (or you) were to send the most current version of this proposal as a privileged communication to the members of the PNAS editorial board. to help frame the discussion that I hope to stimulate in my presentation at their meeting in Washington on April 25?